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ABSTRACT

Drawing from a survey of 2,115 executive and mid-level administrators, research/assessment coordinators, and full-time faculty at 136 community colleges nationwide, this report presents findings regarding community colleges' definitions of student success, identifies the characteristics of high-performing institutions and assesses the extent to which colleges possess these characteristics, and presents strategies for improving student success. After part 1 underscores the need to understand how colleges define and support student success and assess achievement, part 2 examines the role of student goals and expectations, organizational culture, student outcomes, and client satisfaction in understanding and defining student success. Part 3 examines the institutional characteristics and practices contributing to student success, including a reputation for quality, distinctiveness, and innovation; flexible strategies for delivering programs and services; and systems for evaluating and improving performance. Part 4 describes current practices in academic and support services delivery, and presents a new model of delivery. Part 5 describes strategies and approaches for the assessment of student progress and performance, while part 6 describes how institutions can organize for student success, examining the key areas of outreach, organizational responsiveness, and the reconceptualization of management and leadership. The final three sections present conclusions, review the study methodology, and list references and resource materials. Data tables and pie charts are included. (PAA)

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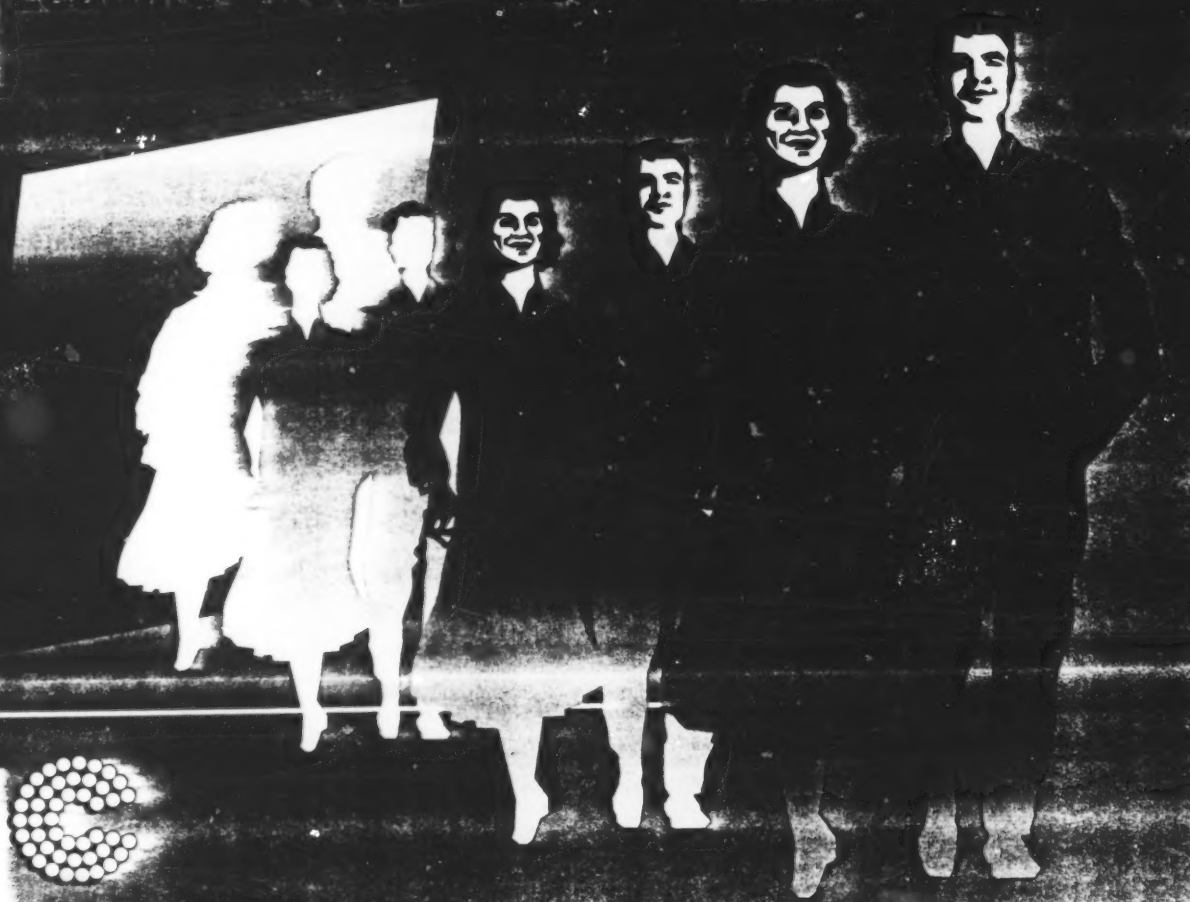
Making Community Colleges More Effective



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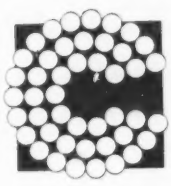

Community College Consortium

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Introduction

"What's the matter? Sensitive to criticism about your college's mission and programs?" "Everyone knows that community colleges are 'do everything' institutions—colleges that admit all who apply and graduate only a fraction who enter. They do not fulfill the promise of the open door because they fail to advance students to higher levels of education and achievement." "Real colleges produce students with degrees and that is the way it should be."

If the foregoing comments made by some politicians, critics, and media observers sound familiar and seem to be representative of current criticism aimed at community colleges, then why are our institutions experiencing a 4 percent annual growth rate? Can it be that community colleges have become "institutions of choice" for high school graduates squeezed out of four-year institutions, workers displaced by economic recession, and adult learners seeking new skills at low cost? Most of our colleges have been managed so effectively that survival is no longer in doubt. They enroll one-half of all entering freshmen and 40% of all postsecondary students. Something is being done right, but we cannot confirm what it is. Are community colleges helping students achieve success in ways we have yet to understand and appreciate?

This question forces to the surface a rather critical issue that has begun to draw attention in recent years. What are the dimensions of student success in community colleges? We know that community colleges are complex institutions that vary in size, purpose, and resources. We also know that in organizations of this type, student success (the common buzz word) consists of many things such as transfer, job placement, degrees and certificates, achieving personal goals, and so forth. We know little, however, about how community colleges promote student

success or assess its accomplishment. How is success defined? What are the important operating practices that contribute to student success? What indicators are colleges measuring? What assessment methods are they using? In other words, what is being done in community colleges to facilitate student success?

Given the pressing need to understand more fully the ways in which community colleges define and support success and assess student achievement, the Community College Consortium conducted a study of success practices in a national spectrum of community colleges. The purpose of the study was to answer two important questions:

> ***How do community colleges define student success and what steps are they taking to support it?***
>
> ***To what extent do community colleges undertake assessment and what are they doing to evaluate student outcomes?***

The first part of this summary report presents important findings about how community colleges define student success, the next identifies characteristics of high performing institutions—those with a capacity to contribute to student success—and describes the extent to which community colleges possess these characteristics, and the last part presents strategies for improving success based on the experience of high performing institutions.

What is Student Success?

Student success is an important but long neglected subject in community colleges. Witness the dearth of scholarship on the subject and the emotion and varied perspectives its discussion evokes. Many view it as the ultimate measure of institutional effectiveness—a statement of the quality and quantity of educational gains experienced by students as a result of college attendance. Others view it as something that cannot be measured—a concept so ambiguous that it defies definition.

Beyond the current debate, those working in community colleges are compelled to look at student success because of the growing interest of outside groups in information about student outcomes. The reporting requirements of Student-Right-to-Know legislation, the Perkins Act, regional accrediting associations, and Ability-to-Benefit legislation provide colleges not only with an opportunity to investigate their effects on students, but also responsibility for reporting the results. Student success, therefore, is a sword that can cut in many ways depending on how it is viewed.

What is student success? We can picture it as the **satisfaction that students and outside groups have with education**. While success can take many forms, economic returns are becoming more important as a measure of value. One result is a shift in the criteria for success from academic degrees to an emphasis on skills which lead to financial rewards. Ask a student about success and he or she may answer, "a well paying job." Ask an employer and he or she probably will answer, "a motivated worker with good skills." Students and employers want practical returns from education.

Three factors appear to be important in student success: **Student goals and expectations, organizational culture,** and **student outcomes.** Student goals and expectations contribute to success by setting parameters for institutional effort—what a college must do to help students achieve important goals. Organizational culture—the pattern of practices, beliefs, and traditions which guides the behavior of individuals and groups—facilitates success by making essential resources available when and where students need them. A telling example would be the way in which support services are provided. Student outcomes, the third factor, comprise the visible evidence of student success. College attendance is supposed to produce knowledge and skills that lead to desirable outcomes. When this happens, community colleges are viewed as high performing institutions. When it doesn't, concerns about quality increase.

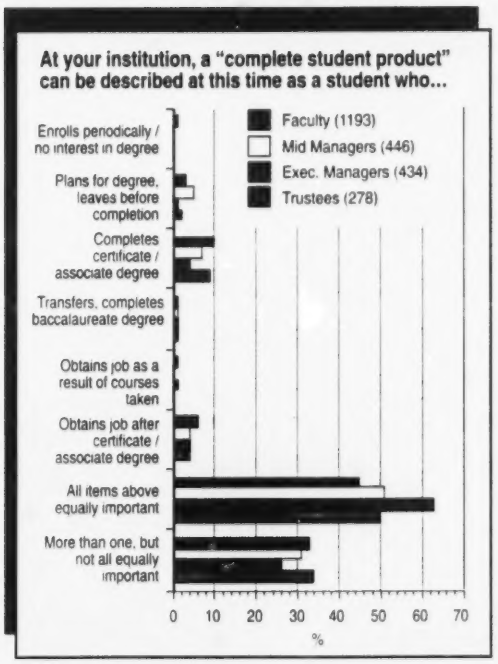
Defining student success requires a blend of these factors. Student goals set limits for achievement, organizational culture facilitates success by providing key resources, outcomes constitute a standard for measuring success, and client satisfaction is as much a gauge of student success as outcomes. Given these basic ideas and an appreciation for the complexity of the concept, we define student success as:

The degree to which student outcomes are supported by the organizational culture, compare favorably to student goals and expectations, and satisfy important groups.

Student Goals and Expectations. What impact do student goals and expectations have on success? Consider the following:

> *After graduating from Susan Anthony High School five years ago, Michael spent one year in college, quit school, worked full-time, enrolled in a community college, endured a layoff, held temporary jobs, and, within the past six months, landed a job he likes—driving a furniture truck. Next fall, he'll try school again when he starts a one-year certificate program that should prepare him to be an emergency medical technician. He'll take classes while holding down a full-time job.*

Michael's bumpy ride illustrates the different, often more circuitous path that community college students follow through postsecondary education. A community college student may aspire to, but not complete, the degree within four or five years after finishing high school. Eventually, making a kind of uneven progress that makes longitudinal tracking nearly impossible, he may indeed finish (Salzman, 1991). Then again, he may not desire to; for many students who enroll in community colleges, completing a degree is not their dream. They try to acquire just enough education to improve their business skills or to satisfy their curiosity about a subject (Salzman, 1991). Completing a degree is of secondary importance to them alongside other commitments. In the words of Adelman (1992), "Once beyond the age of compulsory schooling, American adults prefer college on their own terms and time, and they are more interested in learning than earning degrees."



Work and education are merging and this is having an effect on what students want. More and more students expect to continue their education through adulthood, and thus success for them is many things—completing a course required by an employer, a certificate or an associate degree, finishing courses leading to a marketable skill, and transferring to a four-year college, to name a few. Community colleges respond by broadly defining student success to emphasize the comprehensive nature of student outcomes. This was a major finding of research conducted by Alfred and Linder in 1990. More than three-quarters (82%) of a national sample of 2,410 community college faculty, administrators, and trustees indicated that a combination of different outcomes was necessary to describe student success. (See Table 1.) Specific outcomes such as "enrollment without plans for a degree," "associate degree completion," "transfer," "baccalaureate degree completion," "job entry" etc. were not sufficient, in and of themselves, to describe success.

Table 1. Outcome Measures Describing Student Success

Defining outcomes too narrowly or rigidly misses the point. The lesson to be learned is in the nature and interpretation of student success. Interpreting success on a narrow continuum—worse yet, viewing it is as a single outcome—distorts what community colleges do. And as many presidents can attest, assessing college performance without information about student goals is generally misleading. Relating goals to a variety of outcomes is conceptually sound and it is necessary for anyone wanting to paint a true picture of student success.

Organizational Culture. The culture of each college affects student success. The unique patterns of practice, ritualistic behaviors, and symbolic expressions comprise a context that informs how students, faculty, and administrators work and interact. In some instances, the culture of a technical institute may support career success, but inhibit transfer to a four-year college or university. Conversely, a college that actively promotes the value of its transfer mission may make its vocational students and staff feel like second class citizens.

The culture of community colleges is complex, often contradictory or paradoxical. When asked to describe the behavior of their institutions in important areas, community college faculty and administrators picture a flexible organization made up of simultaneously contradictory yet equally necessary programs, services, and delivery systems (Alfred and Linder, 1990). For example, our colleges offer courses on campus and in communities using different delivery systems, they openly or selectively admit students depending on the field of study, and they use multiple perspectives to determine quality. It is within this culture that multiple perspectives on student success develop. There is an ineffable quality of seeing students in different ways and measuring success accordingly.

Regardless of how simple or complex, however, the culture of our colleges affects student performance. The ways in which basic beliefs and values are enacted in developing budgets, making decisions about curriculum and pedagogy, and the everyday behavior of faculty and staff affect student success. While being located in the far corner of the campus may not affect student performance in an ESL class, it might affect that student's transition into another college program or curriculum.

Student Outcomes. To understand the role that outcomes play in student success, we need only to ask the question: "What are community colleges supposed to do for students in both the short term and the longer term?" The obvious answer is, "make sure that specific goals are achieved." This answer is correct, but it is simplistic. When we talk about outcomes, we are referring to three distinct things. The first is objective information about student progress and performance—courses taken and completed, degrees obtained, jobs entered, transfer achieved, and so forth. The second is feedback or information that can be used to determine the extent to which student goals were attained. Finally, there is information about the extent to which outcomes satisfy or fail to satisfy specific groups—students, employers, and elected officials, for example.

Without this information, little happens. Faculty and administrators need to have information about outcomes to understand what happens to students, to make decisions, and to improve performance. The situation with Keeping Track Community College is typical of what we see with outcomes assessment in community colleges:

Several years ago, faculty and administrators at Keeping Track Community College decided that they needed to know more about their students as they moved through courses and programs and then left to attend another college, to work, or whatever. The truth of the matter was that they really didn't know what happened to most of their students.

In the early years, they had worked hard to create wonderfully efficient systems to register the growing tide of students. Testing and telephone banks, additional sections, extension sites: there was hardly anything they couldn't do to meet the need. But after thousands of students had come through their doors, taken classes, completed certificates, left saying they were going to work, or indicated their desire to transfer, faculty and administrators really didn't know what became of them. And this at a time when politicians and citizens were asking "Did you fulfill your mission? Did you enable that student to get a job or to transfer?"

Wanting to know if their hard efforts had paid off, faculty and administrators at Keeping Track set to work to design a system that used computer technology and human effort to monitor students' progress while they passed through the college and after they graduated. The work wasn't easy. Administrators and faculty had to agree on what to include and how to proceed. And, students are not just course takers, but completers and stop-outs and job seekers or four-year college transfers.

Today, Keeping Track Community College can provide accurate information about the number of students who graduated, those who transferred, where they transferred to, entry job titles and salaries of occupational graduates, and the relationship of job to curriculum. It cannot furnish information about advanced degrees, general education knowledge, and long-term benefits of education.

Community colleges support student success in a variety of ways. Unfortunately, while administrators and faculty believe outcomes assessment is important, they have yet to create the necessary systems to track students.

Client Satisfaction. The feelings of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that students and outside groups have with education are an important and often overlooked dimension of student success. If you don't think that satisfaction is important, just ignore employer calls for change in courses and programs and see how many students they hire in the future. Different groups have different expectations of community colleges. This diversity can lead to difficulty when leaders try to develop coherent definitions of student success.

What follows is a scenario that would challenge any leader interested in student success. This scenario illustrates the different needs that outside groups have for education and resulting implications for student success.

The scene unfolds at the weekly meeting of the Anywhere, USA Rotary Club where a topic of discussion has been the percentage of students graduating with a degree. To get a better grasp of what local colleges are doing, the Rotary Club has asked President Crackerjack of Anywhere Community College to deliver a brief speech on the college's accomplishments with students. In the audience are business and industry executives, county government officials, state legislators, influential citizens, university administrators, and selected faculty and administrators from Anywhere College. Legislator John Doe is also

in the audience. He has been leading the charge to find out just how many students community colleges graduate. To him the only legitimate form of success is a degree—preferably the baccalaureate degree. Anything else is not acceptable.

President Crackerjack talked for 15 minutes about the diversity of needs and abilities of students attending community colleges. She took great care to describe the variety of outcomes achieved by students with different goals. No sooner had she finished than Legislator Doe raised his hand to ask a question: Can you tell me what percentage of students—an exact number—graduate from community colleges within four years after beginning study? As the president began to provide an answer based on the limited information her college was able to obtain from state universities and through follow-up surveys, she wondered about audience expectations and feared that like Legislator Doe, they were focused too narrowly on the degree as the only meaningful outcome. Was a degree the only acceptable outcome of education? How would the audience react to an answer indicating only a small percentage of students graduating with a degree? What other forms of student success, if any, were valued? Could the audience be convinced that other types of outcomes are just as important, if not more important, than a degree?

There is an entire course on applied psychology tied up in this scenario, but the wisdom can be distilled down to a simple principle: **There is no universal definition for student success. Different groups bring different values to the table when they look at student outcomes. Success for one group is partial success or failure for another. Student success is in the eye of the beholder—it all depends on what is important.**

Some institutions and individuals are up to the challenge of defining student success and some are not. In between are those who can, and will, develop conceptions that fit particular times and particular circumstances. It is our hope that what follows—our account of factors contributing to student success in high performing community colleges—will make this challenge easier.

Success Practices in High Performing Colleges

We know that community colleges differ from other types of colleges in certain characteristics such as organizational culture, student needs and expectations, and definitions of student success. On one topic, the research evidence is conclusive—community colleges represent a different culture for student success than baccalaureate degree institutions. Two decades of growth have broadened their mission and programs. Like hospitals and airlines, they have become client-centered organizations.

It is this point that identifies one of the most important findings about community colleges in the Community College Consortium study. This finding can be summarized as follows: **Community colleges fully accept the multiple missions expected of them by students and constituencies. They facilitate student success by using a variety of approaches to determine how well they are doing. This aspect of culture focuses on the nature of competing expectations. Effectiveness in the eyes of many groups is what counts, not necessarily effectiveness in the eyes of any single group.**

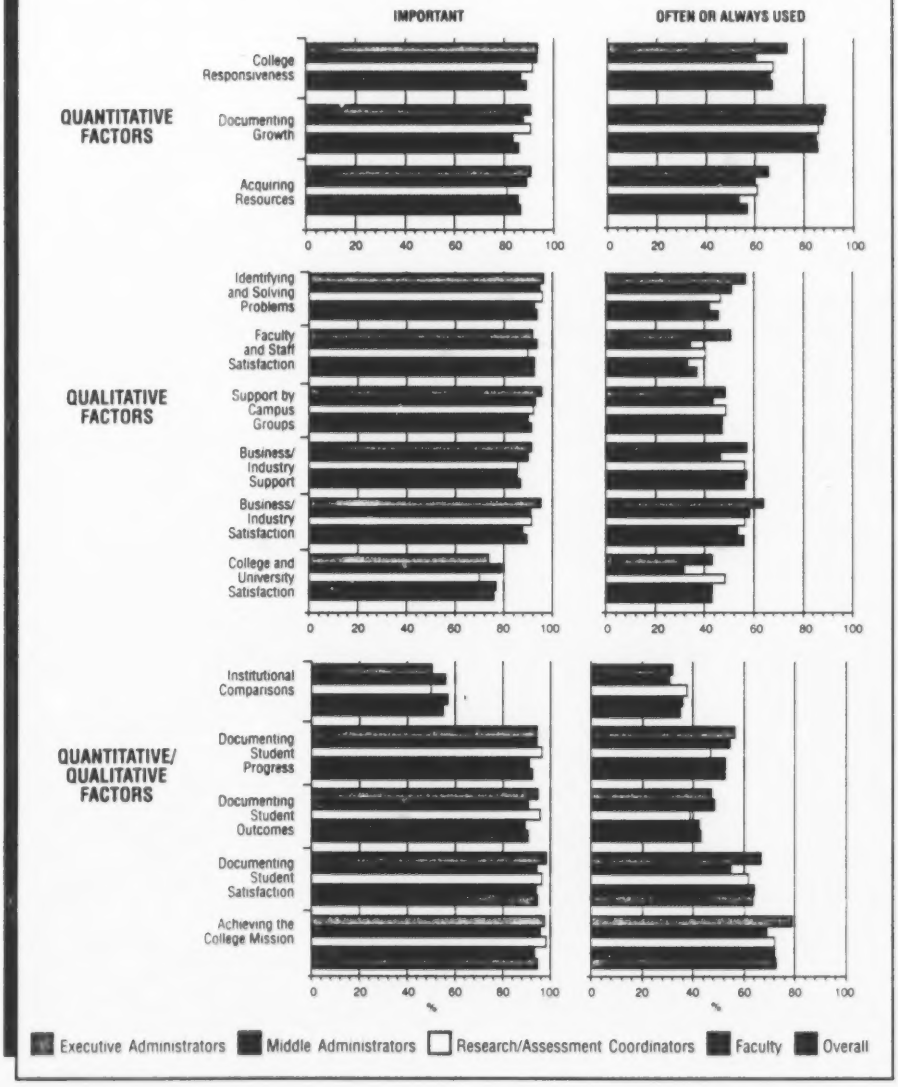
We can show how competing expectations contribute to success by looking at what community colleges consider important for determining effectiveness. The information in Table 2 (see next page) shows that the majority (90%) of faculty and administrators participating in the Consortium study believe that a combination of factors are "important" or "very important" for determining effectiveness. Some of these factors are *quantitative* (documenting growth, acquiring resources, responding to community needs), while others are *qualitative* (identifying and solving problems, gaining business and industry support, ensuring support by campus groups, and so forth).

When we turn to the factors actually used for determining effectiveness, a different picture emerges. The most frequently used factors are quantitative—"documenting growth," "acquiring resources," and "documenting college responsiveness." Qualitative indicators such as "student satisfaction," "faculty and staff satisfaction," "identifying and solving problems" are viewed as important in effectiveness assessment, but are enacted a much smaller percentage of the time. For example, 9 out of 10 respondents believe that "identifying and solving institutional problems" is often or always important; however, only 4 out of 10 report that it is used. This difference suggests a gap between intention and action. While the ability to recognize a need exists, the tendency to implement change does not. Our colleges must do more to enact strategies that affect quality. Effective colleges will show evidence that they have something special to offer by adjusting their performance to the needs of different clients, especially in competitive markets where clients don't readily see important differences in the choices offered them.

The hard reality is that our colleges have turned performance assessment into a numbers game where success is equated with growth. The message here, we think, is that the administrative organization of community colleges is lagging behind the culture. Much of the success experienced by our colleges can be traced to a dynamic, multi-faceted culture which encourages strong relationships with constituencies by providing services to keep pace with changing needs and motivations. In stark contrast is an administrative organization which favors efficiency and control. Convenience is the norm for documenting performance; the emphasis is on quantitative factors which demonstrate growth. Information of this type is easily collected, it is easily understood and interpreted, and it fits nicely with existing decision support systems.

Managing performance means putting the best face on the institution in every exchange. Every time a college provides a service, the student makes an assessment of the quality of the service, even if unconsciously. The sum total of repeated assessments by this student and the collective assessments by all students establish in their minds the college's image in terms of effectiveness.

Table 2. Effectiveness Factors in Community Colleges



Is evidence of growth sufficient to establish an image of effectiveness for community colleges? Faculty and administrators are finding that classic market niche strategies of access, cost, and comprehensiveness are not enough to ensure effectiveness. Theodore Levitt likens the relationship between today's customer and service provider to a marriage that focuses on keeping the customer happy with the provider after the sale. In Levitt's words:

> *Thanks to increasing interdependence, more and more of the world's economic work gets done through long term relationships between sellers and buyers. It is not a matter of just*

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getting and then holding onto your customers. It is more a matter of giving the buyers what they want. Buyers want vendors who keep promises, [and] who'll keep supplying and standing behind what they promised. The era of the one-night stand is gone. Marriage [between buyer and seller] is both necessary and more convenient. Products are too complicated, repeat negotiations too much of a hassle and too costly. Under these conditions, success in marketing is transformed into the inescapability of a relationship (Levitt, 1983).

To what extent are community colleges building meaningful relationships with students? What is the linkage between service and student success? What characteristics distinguish colleges that effectively contribute to student success from those which do not? We believe that institutions which successfully organize and manage for service simultaneously contribute to student success. We also believe that three important characteristics differentiate high performing community colleges from mediocre ones: 1) reputation for quality, distinctiveness and innovation, 2) flexible strategies for delivering programs and services, and 3) systems for evaluating and improving performance (Alfred, 1992). These characteristics will become the basis for recommendations to restructure institutions for student success in a later chapter, so we shall touch on them only briefly here.

Reputation for Quality, Distinctiveness, and Innovation. Community colleges that contribute to student success have developed high quality programs and services, hired outstanding staff, and installed systems for introducing new ideas and acquiring resources. This reputation and regard for quality, or *quality* as we shall call it, directs the attention of faculty and staff toward changes that must be made to sustain or improve quality. It informs how instructors teach and how administrators make decisions. It becomes the central theme of a message delivered to students through programs and services.

Flexible Strategies for Delivering Programs and Services. The delivery system that backs up programs and services is truly for the convenience of students rather than staff. The physical facilities, policies, procedures, marketing, and communication processes—*delivery* we shall call them—all say to students, "this institution is here to meet your needs." Customer service is an essential strategic part of any institution. Practiced by all staff as an institutional philosophy, service excellence sets a college apart from the competition and gives it sustainable advantage.

Systems for Evaluation and Improving Performance. By organized means, faculty and staff assess student outcomes at frequent intervals during and after college. They convert outcomes information into decisions that improve programs, make changes in the way services are delivered, and report to external groups. We shall call this characteristic *performance*. Staff involved in evaluating performance fine tune programs and services to a level that marks them as superior in the minds of students.

These three characteristics—*quality, program and service delivery,* and *performance assessment*—are relatively simple in concept and easy to understand. Yet making them a reality is a challenging task, especially in large institutions. The obvious question facing our colleges is, how do these characteristics contribute to student success? Is there a perspective, some sort of framework, or a model for thinking about student success in community colleges?

It is useful, we believe, to think of community colleges and students as engaged in a relationship like that shown in Figure 1. This *student success triangle*, as we call it, represents the three characteristics of quality, delivery, and performance as more or less revolving around students and service markets in a creative interplay. The triangle model is radically different from the standard organizational chart. It represents a process rather than a structure and it encourages us to begin with students in our conception of success.

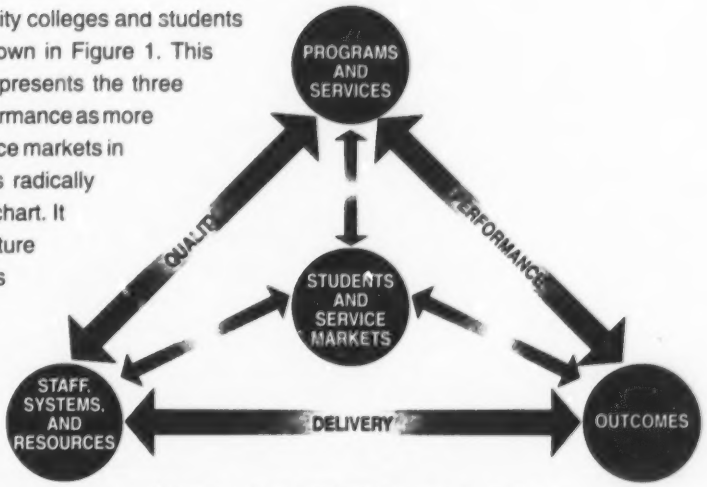


Figure 1. The Student Success Triangle

Table 3 (see next page) uses information from research and practice to take the student success triangle a step further (Alfred and Weissman, 1987 and Alfred, 1992). It identifies practices contributing to student success at different points in the triangle. It is useful to note several aspects of this table, which in itself represents a hypothesis about student success based on general experience. First, it acknowledges that resources—staff, money, and programs—are essential. Community colleges without full resources will generate limited outcomes with students because they cannot provide the range and variety of services needed. Second, the practices that are most effective in terms of long-term benefits for students and institutions—performance assessment and feedback mechanisms—are likely to be the hardest and most time consuming to implement. Finally, it is perhaps surprising that practices such as "staff empowerment" and "cost sensitivity" are included as contributors to student success. Faculty and staff who lack motivation because they do not hold a stake in the institution cannot contribute to student success. Institutions which lose sight of the relationship between benefits and costs run the risk of isolating themselves from "real world" beliefs about quality. To better understand how these and other practices contribute to student success, each is considered in turn.

Quality. Programs and services require resources and talented staff to produce outcomes that are valued. High quality programs operate as small fiefdoms upholding tight standards. They consistently deliver benefits that meet or exceed expectations and are perceived as being better than the competition. This perception contributes to a reputation for quality which in itself can raise student expectations and improve performance. Capacity for innovation is a distinguishing characteristic of high quality programs. The ability to innovate—to change in response to student needs—opens the door to student success regardless of the cost of implementing the innovation.

Program and Service Delivery. Practices for delivering programs and services are especially critical in creating a culture for student success. This is particularly true for students who require special services to stay in college. Efforts made by community colleges to assess student needs and deliver programs and services at convenient times and locations will do much to move learners through the system. Opportunities for success grow with the convenience afforded students, as administrators of colleges-without-walls who have delivered programs in

Table 3. Practices Contributing to Student Success in Community Colleges

	PRACTICE	DESCRIPTION
QUALITY	Distinctiveness of programs and services	Programs and services that are appealing to students because they are one of a kind, superior to competitors, or unparalleled in quality and cost
	Diversified and full resources	Flexible funding to support programs, services, and operations
	Capacity for innovation	Willingness to take risks in the development of new programs and services based on information about student needs and preferences
	Empowered staff	Authority delegated to staff for streamlining administrative operations and improving quality
DELIVERY	Continuous assessment of student needs and expectations	Continuous market research, matching institutional programs and services with student and community needs
	Orientation to student and client service	Rapid response to student needs for quality, convenience, and cost in programs and services
	Proactive support services	Support services which inject the college into the lives of students and prevent negative outcomes from occurring
	Demonstrated expertise in marketing	Innovative marketing strategies focusing on results (outcomes), not operations
PERFORMANCE	Mechanisms for feedback	Systematic research on program performance (student outcomes, student satisfaction, etc.) to determine strengths, weaknesses, and needs for improvement
	Timely strategic decisions	Institutional practices for considering performance information in strategic decisions
	Product visibility	Proactive decisions about programs and services (introduction, termination, modification) to enhance quality, attract resources, and check competition
	Sensitivity to management of cost	Regular reporting of student outcomes information to external groups

community centers have discovered. Thus, one key to success is to create delivery systems which focus on the needs of students. Another is to provide proactive support services which reach out and serve students. When asked about what they learned in college, students frequently mention that access to support services outside class improved their academic skills, competence, and self-assurance (Marchese, 1990). The research is unequivocal: students who are actively involved in both academic and out-of-class activities gain more from the college experience than those who are not so involved (Kuh, 1990).

Performance Assessment. Systems for assessing and improving performance are important contributors to student success as noted in Table 3. Outcomes information is the closest equivalent to product performance in the business world. It leads to improvement in quality—and, ultimately, to student success—as changes are made in programs and services. However, this information is useless if mechanisms are not in place to apply data to decisions. Here we encounter a Catch-22. We may have outcomes information and want to use it, but cannot do so because the resulting changes will disrupt the institution. This is why decisions involving programs and services continue to be made on the basis of available resources—not student outcomes.

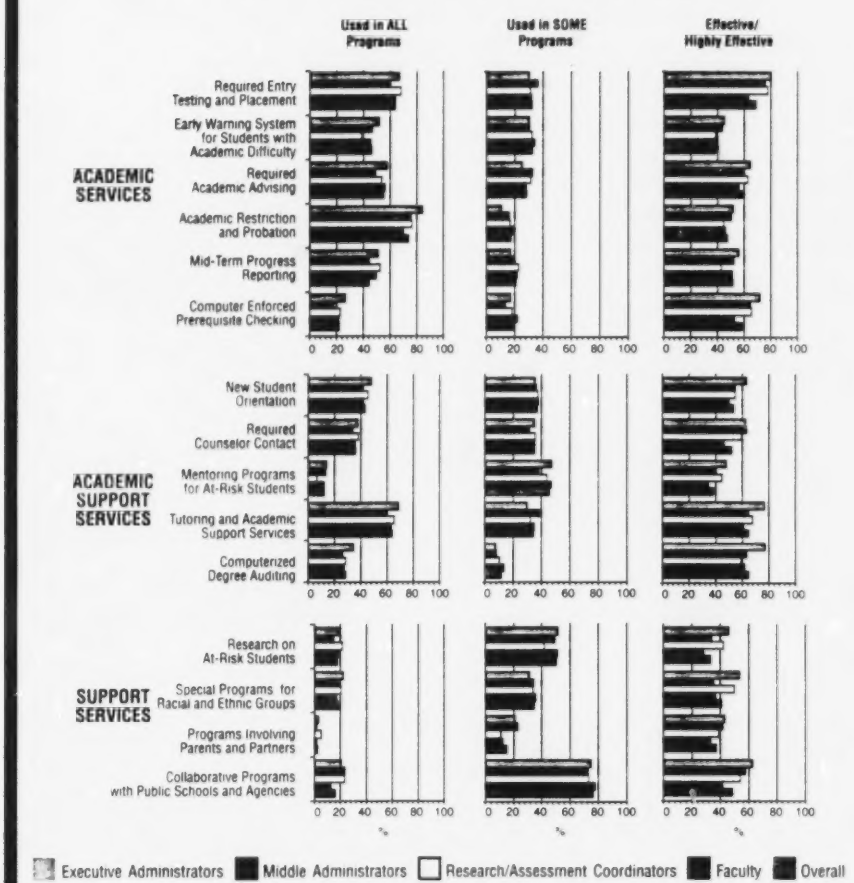
In total, these strategies illustrate three lessons about student success in community colleges: The value and impact of high quality programs and services on staff who must work hard to sustain quality, the impact of flexible delivery systems on students with changing needs and expectations, and the critical importance of systems for assessing and improving performance. Colleges contributing to student success will constantly innovate; they will streamline administrative operations to serve students faster and better; they will inject the institution into the lives of students through proactive services; and they will conduct continuous research on student needs, outcomes, and satisfaction. As more and more community colleges start thinking of students as clients, and finding better ways to serve them, the factor of student success will emerge more and more strongly as a competitive advantage.

Service Delivery

The student success triangle provides a much needed conceptual framework for thinking about student success and for developing a culture that contributes to success. Except for some special considerations about high performing institutions, much is congruent with what is already known. From our point of view, two areas in the triangle represent potential weaknesses for community colleges and require further examination: 1) practices for delivering programs and services to students and 2) systems for assessing student progress and performance. This section and the next focus on what research has to say about service delivery and assessment as top management concerns in community colleges.

Current Practices in Service Delivery. The advice of experts in student development has strongly emphasized the need for support services tailored to the unique needs and characteristics of each student (Schlossberg, et.al., 1989 and Kuh, et.al., 1991). Yet, our knowledge of community college students suggests that common practices might be included in the efforts used by most institutions to promote student success. To explore this question, we identified 15 support services in community colleges and divided them into three categories depending on how closely they were connected to classroom instruction. "Academic" services were those such as entry testing and placement, required academic advising, and mid-term progress reporting, which are directly linked to classroom instruction. "Academic Support" and "Support" services included services such as new student orientation and collaborative programs with community groups which are needed by students, but not directly linked to instruction. The belief underlying this division was one of increasing use with increasing proximity to instruction. The more closely a support service was connected to the classroom, the more likely it was to be provided and to be recognized by staff throughout the institution.

Table 4. Support Services in Community Colleges



To check the accuracy of this belief, we asked faculty and administrators to indicate the extent to which services in each category were provided. Additionally, we gathered information about faculty and administrator views on how effective these services were in helping students succeed. What services helped students stay in college and achieve goals? How widely were they used? What is their value to students and the institution? In other words, are community colleges effectively organized to promote student success through support services?

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The results are presented in Table 4 (see previous page). The evidence is clear that support services are provided on a variable basis, depending on how closely they are linked to instruction. Only 4 of 15 support services—most of them in the Academic category—were cited by half or more of the respondents as operating in all programs. Practices such as "required entry testing and placement" (64%), "required academic advising" (56%), and "academic restriction and probation" (72%) are directly linked to classroom instruction. The frequencies with which they are reported suggest that community colleges organize and deliver support services around the classroom—the only point of contact many of them have with students.

Our colleges are much less likely to employ support services away from the classroom. Of five services listed in the Academic Support category—those which support, but are not directly linked to instruction—only one ("tutoring and academic support services") was cited by more than half of the respondents as operating in all programs. The remaining practices—"new student orientation," "required counselor contact," "mentoring programs for at-risk students," and "computerized degree auditing"—were reported by a comparatively small number of respondents.

The least frequently cited services were those in the Support category, which were reported by less than a quarter of the respondents. These are services carried out with special groups away from college. Some examples include "special programs for racial and ethnic groups," "programs involving parents and partners," and "collaborative programs with public schools." The fact that these services are provided on a limited basis suggests again that support services in community colleges are organized around the classroom. The more detached the service is from instruction, the less likely it will be provided.

In general, our colleges are locked into an outdated methodology of delivering support services. Instructors and advisors wait for students to come in for appointments. The students say, "I have this problem or need," and the staff member provides the service. Students are in a hurry to leave campus for work and other obligations. Staff, feeling the pressure of their own work day, hurry to deliver needed services. Little, if any, time is spent helping students plan their academic careers or cope with the demands of college. Alternative delivery systems do not appear to merit consideration. When asked "how effective" they thought different support services were, staff answered by assigning the highest marks to services carried out in proximity to the classroom. Apparently, support services can best be provided on campus by full-time staff. Regardless of student needs, services which do not involve interchange with staff during regular hours in a controlled setting are not viewed favorably—possibly because they may disrupt personal schedules.

New Service Model. What can community colleges do to provide support services which meet student needs? In addition to campus-based practices, they can employ outreach activities to help students negotiate a complex culture. The case of Outreach Community College provides a good example of what our colleges can do:

> *Outreach Community College decided several years ago that it could only succeed with at-risk students if it began to work cooperatively with high schools in the service district. After numerous discussions with guidance counselors and teachers, college staff decided to focus on high school freshmen and sophomores who had demonstrated academic*

capability at some point in their school work, but who had fallen into patterns of truancy, fighting, and insubordination. There was also a high incidence of teen pregnancy among members of this group.

A pilot, voluntary program was developed to enhance these students' self-respect and to improve their communication skills. The college development office worked to secure funding from a foundation for part of the project; state monies for special populations were used to support other aspects of the program. In addition to serving the students during their school day, the parents of the students were invited to a nearby campus of the college for workshops on parenting and other skills that would support the students' endeavors. As student attendance and performance began to improve, college counselors began to talk with them about college. In addition to discussing the programs at Outreach, counselors provided information about other educational opportunities, including several historically black colleges with which Outreach had just completed articulation agreements.

While no single set of activities is right for all institutions, high performing institutions consistently and aggressively reach out to students by assessing needs, adjusting programs and services, and maintaining a powerful client orientation. Too often, our colleges are organized to accomplish a different end—to maintain harmony by providing services at times and locations convenient for staff. After years of service, there is a natural tendency for staff to facilitate their professional day; in so doing, they may distance themselves from students.

Community college students and adult learners have a much broader spectrum of needs related to home, work, and civic roles compared to learners who have yet to take on this added burden of responsibility. According to Kempner (1990):

Although most faculty see the students as important, community colleges are maybe like a store. As "customers," the students come to take what is offered and the faculty members do not have to be "committed to change." Because the college is not "a large part of the students' lives," some instructors believe, "there is less concern about directed, purposeful, behavioral change among the faculty." Interestingly, students use the same concept of "service" to explain what helped or hindered their learning and ultimate success. "I'm paying for a service," said one, "so teach me content and don't try to push me out. I can't afford to get a professor who weeds us out ... . It's so hard to keep motivated when you have other responsibilities of the family and work. I've been real close to bagging it. We need to be encouraged."

What does this say about support services in community colleges? It informs us that services must be flexibly organized to meet needs. **Student development and learner achievements, which lead to successful outcomes, are best accomplished through an organization that prevents negative outcomes from occurring. A prevention orientation means that administrators, faculty, and staff need to become increasingly proactive—to use their skills and experience to design intervention strategies for such potentially vulnerable student populations as single parents, returning adult learners, underprepared learners, and unemployed workers.** Such strategies can include programs to strengthen self-esteem, build confidence, and improve competence and coping skills through outreach efforts carefully crafted to meet identified needs.

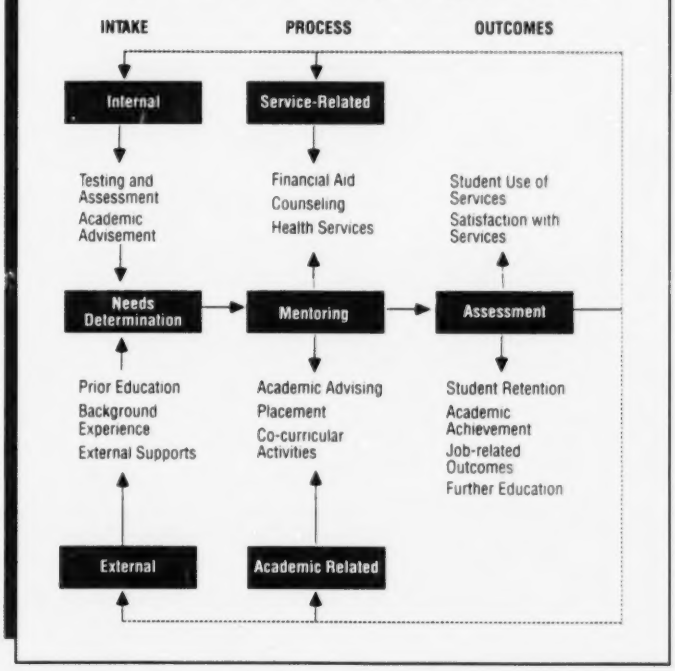
Unfortunately, without an infrastructure in place to carry out an aggressive program, this prevention approach will not be possible. Support services in community colleges are organized along functional lines of academic and student services. Little communication and minimal integration exist among these services and between these services and academic departments. Students bring complex problems, but experience fragmented and compartmentalized responses. A different situation can be observed for students involved in special programs. Over time, services for special populations—such as handicapped and adult learners who may be particularly at-risk for not completing their education—have been integrated across functions, with program coordinators acting as advocates for their group. Students in these groups feel supported; they have a sense of belonging to the institution.

What is needed is not a whole new set of services for students. We recommend a model for support services that connects students and institutions by reaching out through aggressive services. Derived from the work of Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989), this model implies that staff must view themselves as effective agents for involving students in the institution. It implies an active interest in assessment and an openness to change. It implies a capacity to question existing assumptions about services—to seek new ways to deliver services based on student needs. It moves services away from scheduling and it rewards instructors and staff for time they spend working with students. The proposed model is presented in Figure 2.

The first stage in the model, *intake*, uses support services such as testing, entry assessment, and admissions counseling to determine the position and needs of the learner in relationship to the institution. Critical questions to be addressed and answered are:

- Is the student academically and socially prepared for college?
- What is the student's previous experience with education? When did this experience occur?
- What external supports does the student have to facilitate or retard success (including financial assets, family support, work environment, etc.)?
- What specific needs (academic and non-academic) does the student have that must be addressed to improve the chance for success?

Figure 2. Model for Delivery of Support Services



The second stage of the model begins with mentoring, a process designed to fit the

needs of students with important features of the college. Labeled the *process* stage, the objective of support services in this stage is to meet student needs inside and outside of the classroom based on information acquired earlier. Critical processes in this stage center on connecting each student to a recognized member of the college community—a faculty member, student development professional, or staff member—who can serve as a mentor or intermediary. Mentors, counselors, support service specialists, and academic advisors work together to refer students as needed to specific support services: career and personal counseling, financial aid, health services, and other services such as parking, transportation, and job placement. The support services, such as career counseling, may make referrals back to the mentor. Through a connection to a member of the college community, each student will have access to and be part of a network of services and programs that make up an integrated system.

The third stage in the model, *outcomes*, keys on assessment as a method for determining the impact of support services on students. This stage involves research to determine the extent to which services were used, how satisfied students are with them, and the relationship of services to outcomes in work and further education. Using the results of research to improve services (feedback) means adjusting class schedules, locations, and program offerings, as well as faculty, counselor, and business office hours to accommodate student work schedules and needs. It also means changing to a prevention orientation in career and personal counseling, learning resource centers, and student services. Such services as child care and transportation may also be provided or adjusted to meet the special needs of commuting students. In other words, services will be provided to students at times and places convenient for them, by staff who understand their needs and can help them achieve important goals.

A comprehensive assessment of current services using this model is an important step for community colleges. Restructuring the delivery of support services to accommodate student needs and to promote success is essential to the future of our colleges; it is also a critical challenge to faculty and staff.

Progress and Performance Assessment

Returning to the concept of the student success triangle presented earlier (see Figure 1), planners and researchers suggest that one of the most important strategic tasks for any college is to identify the near- and long-term outcomes of education (Ewell, 1984; Astin, 1985; Peterson, et.al., 1986). This is especially true of institutions with a comprehensive mission, in which academic degrees may not be the primary measure of success. Yet it is ironic that community colleges do not know the full scale of their impact on students. Many have taken a passive approach to assessment based on a belief that quality and

low cost will earn them high marks. The one aspect of the success triangle that many of our colleges have been slow to address is performance assessment.

In this section we will attempt to answer some important questions about assessment practices in community colleges:

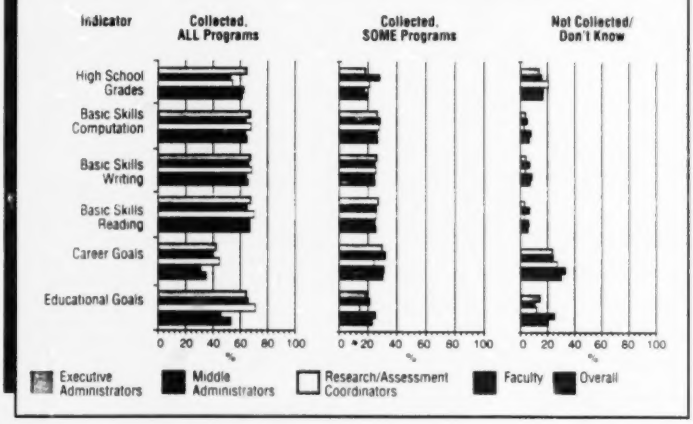
1. What types of information are collected from students at different points of contact with the college?
2. How often is this information collected?
3. How widely is assessment used—is it used in all programs, some programs, none, etc.?

The Assessment Cycle. One of the obvious places to start in thinking about assessment is to determine the extent to which our colleges collect information from students. Think about your institution. What are the various points of contact at which things happen to students and they pass judgment? For how many of these "points of contact" does your college collect information to determine what happened?

To help your thinking process, visualize your college as dealing with students and outside groups in terms of a **cycle of assessment**—an ongoing chain of events in which changes occur in the lives of students. The cycle begins at the very first point of contact between the student and your college. It may be the instant at which the student sees your advertisement, hears a radio spot, or talks to a friend. Or it may be a more organized event designed to facilitate the transition to college such as orientation or academic advisement. It ends, only temporarily, when the student considers the service complete, and it begins anew when he or she decides to come back for more.

To determine what assessment activities are carried out at critical points, we divided the assessment cycle into three phases. We then identified important information about students that institutions should have and asked faculty and administrators to tell us whether or not the information is collected. Our summary of data gathering activities in each phase of the assessment cycle is presented below.

Table 5. Information Collected from Students at Entry



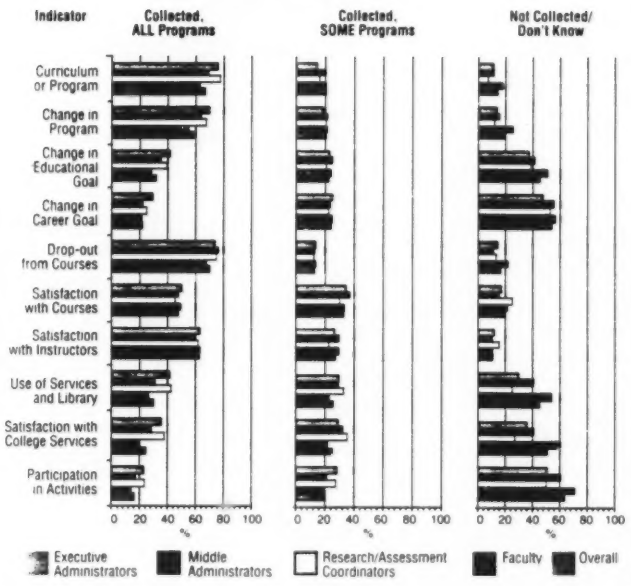
Entry Assessment. There is remarkable consistency among and within colleges in the information collected from students at entry. As indicated in Table 5, 3 out of 4 faculty and administrators reported that information about student educational goals, basic skills proficiency (reading, writing and math), and high school grades is collected at entry in all programs. To a lesser extent, information about career goals is collected.

Our findings reveal that basic skills assessment is a one shot activity occurring at admission only. Fewer than 20 percent of the respondents indicated that this information is collected after initial

enrollment. This lack of effort may be explained by two important distinctions. First, community colleges have placed the emphasis on systems and procedures for collecting information from students at entry—the point at which routine data collection procedures can be enforced as a prerequisite for admission and registration. This capacity diminishes as programs become a "home base" for students and attention turns to the next cohort which must be tested and placed, thus restricting follow-up efforts. A second distinction is that follow-up efforts are costly and time consuming. Limited resources are available to support an institution-wide research function. Lacking resources, institutions focus on indicators of student flow which form the basis of a grading system for programs and services.

Student Progress and Outcomes Assessment. College leaders who have carefully watched trends in the student population or come into contact with students through other means have observed an extraordinary diversity in entering students. They have come to expect variation in student progress depending on entry goals and expectations. A lot of research has been done on what happens to students after they enroll in college. This research has not considered the diversity of information collected and the frequency with which it is collected. We asked respondents, therefore, to identify the types of information collected from students during and after college. We wanted to learn the extent to which data gathering begun with students at entry continued during and after college.

Table 6. Information Collected from Students During College



The expected contrast is, in fact, evident. Table 6 shows that information about students and their involvement with the institution begins to deteriorate after initial enrollment. Our colleges maintain excellent records of student flow into and out of courses and programs. Almost two-thirds of the responding faculty and administrators reported that information is collected in all programs describing course and program enrollments as well as changes in student enrollment. However, comparatively little information is available concerning student roles and activities outside of class, their involvement and satisfaction with the institution, and what happens after college. Less than one-quarter of the respondents reported that information describing student use and satisfaction with services is collected in all programs.

The experience of Resistance Community College shows how this can happen:

> *Resistance Community College has been arguing about the assessment of student learning for more than five years. Working under a rather loosely structured state mandate, the college has worked to define student learning outcomes and to assess student learning. While the college has made some progress, it has not come easily. More than half of the faculty have devoted their professional lives to the college. Length of service for this group averages 18 years and most would prefer to keep the college in its present state. Although they know little about students outside of their role as learners, they feel that the limited assessment they are doing is enough. College administrators and state officials do not recognize the assessment of student learning that is already going on in their courses. Why do they need to do more—especially to fulfill the whim of administrators? Faculty in Resistance Community College profess a rudimentary understanding of the basic issues and concepts of assessment. They feel challenged and threatened by the requirement. Furthermore, the broadly based distribution system used to organize the college's curriculum resists easy assessment. Broader bases of agreement need to be constructed, but the process is slow, the frustration high.*

This context for assessment is typical of many of our institutions. Tight resources and high resistance result in a tendency to collect only the most essential information. As students leave, record keeping centers on immediate outcomes in work and further education. Table 6 on the next page shows that most of our colleges collect data describing four-year college transfer, the relationship of job to curriculum, and entry salary/first job. Comparatively few collect data describing affective factors related to college attendance (i.e., goal achievement, satisfaction with curricula, and satisfaction with support services) and very few collect data measuring basic skills and general education knowledge at exit.

After exit, data gathering efforts come to a standstill. If we focus on long-term indicators of student success (see Table 8), we see that a majority of faculty and administrators report limited efforts to gather follow-up data from students. To illustrate, using the information in Tables 7 and 8 to compare the percentages of faculty and administrators reporting data gathering efforts for near-term and long-term outcomes, we see the following:

STUDENT SUCCESS INDICATOR	PERCENTAGE REPORTING INFORMATION "NOT COLLECTED"
Near-term (at exit)	
Four-year college transfer	40%
Relationship of job to curriculum	50%
Entry salary/first job	54%
Long-term (1-3 years after exit)	
GPA at four-year college	64%
Attainment of baccalaureate degree	72%
Job, promotion and advancement	76%
Changes in salary	80%

Table 7. Information Collected from Students at Exit

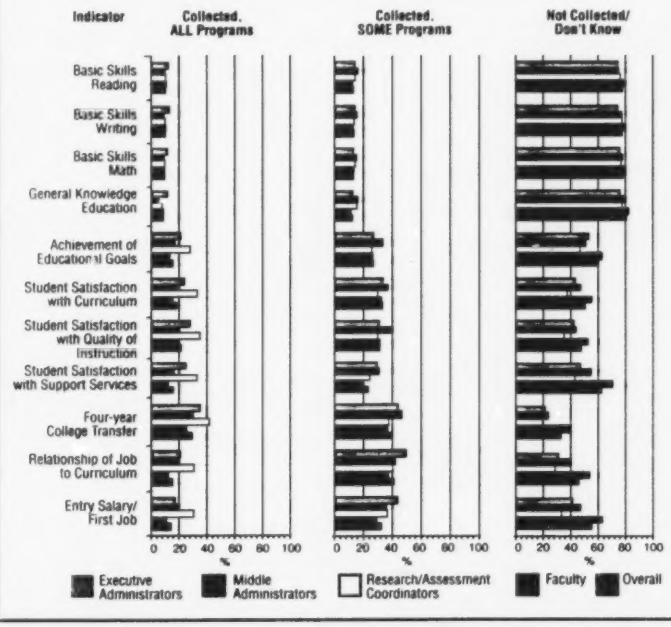
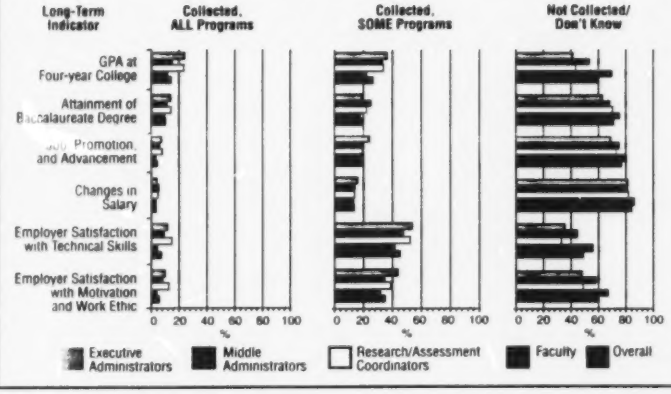


Table 8: Information Collected from Students at Least Once After Exit



The data on employer satisfaction presents an interesting portrait of beginning efforts to tap employer attitudes toward community colleges. It is obvious, first, that many institutions do not collect data from employers (see Table 8). However the incidence of data collection after exit is greater from employers than it is from four-year colleges and former students. While the gap between data collection efforts conducted with alumni and four-year colleges is not great, the difference in effort with employers is noticeable.

Modeling Current Practice. Is there a perspective, some sort of model to explain what is happening in assessment? It is useful, we believe, to think of assessment as taking place in a funnel with a large opening at one end and a narrow port at the other as shown in Figure 3 (see next page). If we divide assessment information into different categories based on when it is collected, a clear pattern emerges. Community colleges are most likely to gather information from students at entry—the beginning of the funnel. As students move through the funnel the amount and types of information decrease and become more highly specialized, focusing on student flow in programs and courses. At exit, colleges make a strong effort to gather information from students at the point of leaving, but not after. In other words, the focus is on "near-term" indicators such as transfer, relationship of job to curriculum, and entry salary in contrast to long-term indicators such as advanced degrees, job changes, and employer satisfaction.

We can, in part, explain this pattern by looking at the organization for assessment in our colleges. Most are organized along functional lines as opposed to assessment cycle lines in dealing with students. When this happens, no one is responsible for ensuring that a full bank of information is collected. In the abstract, of course, the president is accountable, and everyone who comes into contact with the student is responsible. But the simple fact remains

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that when no one is specifically accountable for the cycle of assessment, from beginning to end, the student's experience with the college is undetermined and information that can be used to improve programs and services is lost.

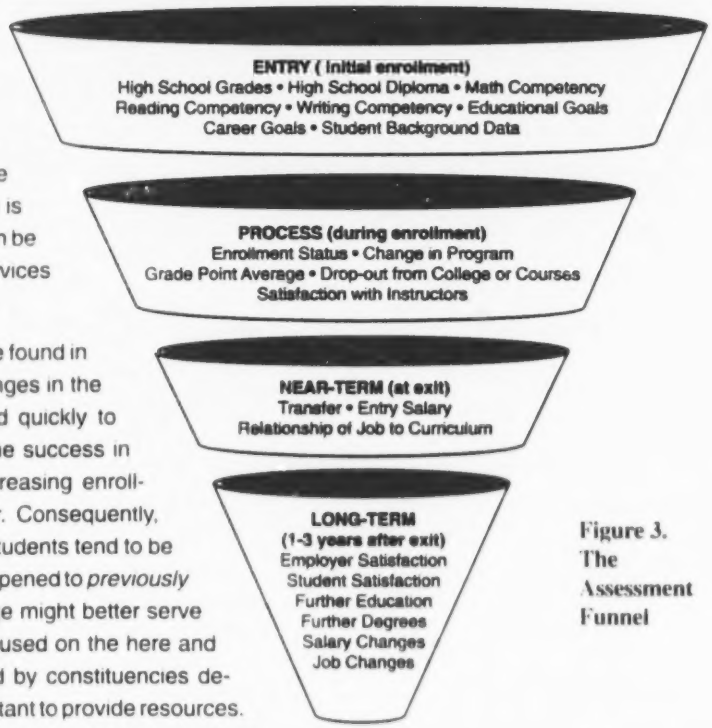

ENTRY (Initial enrollment)
High School Grades • High School Diploma • Math Competency
Reading Competency • Writing Competency • Educational Goals
Career Goals • Student Background Data
PROCESS (during enrollment)
Enrollment Status • Change in Program
Grade Point Average • Drop-out from College or Courses
Satisfaction with Instructors
NEAR-TERM (at exit)
Transfer • Entry Salary
Relationship of Job to Curriculum
LONG-TERM
(1-3 years after exit)
Employer Satisfaction
Student Satisfaction
Further Education
Further Degrees
Salary Changes
Job Changes

Figure 3. The Assessment Funnel

A more compelling explanation can be found in the way our colleges respond to changes in the external environment. Many respond quickly to urgent community needs. They define success in terms of growth, with constantly increasing enrollments the commonly used indicator. Consequently, factors that affect *currently enrolled* students tend to be seen as more important than what happened to *previously enrolled* students and how the college might better serve *future* students. Our colleges are focused on the here and now. This circumstance is reinforced by constituencies demanding additional services, but reluctant to provide resources. In this view, there really is no alternative but to concentrate efforts on students who currently need services. The resulting lack of depth in outcomes assessment makes our colleges vulnerable to probes and inquiries concerning the benefits of education.

Designing Assessment for Student Success. A striking feature of high performing colleges is continuous performance assessment, particularly after a service has been rendered. The system for assessment works so well and information is produced so regularly that a college is able to make continuous improvement in programs and services based on assessment results. If we are interested in using assessment results to improve the quality of programs and services, it makes sense to start with the student as our way of knowing how well we are doing. There is a simple way to depict what our colleges need to know about students. This approach to assessment begins by identifying important points of contact students have with the institution. It goes on to use a proposition about student success to describe the many ways students and institutions interact and the outcomes of this interaction.

Figure 4 is a schematic of a new model for assessment. Derived from the work of Albrecht and Zemke (1985), it reads like this: **If** students enroll and **if** the college offers programs and services that meet student needs based on assessment information, **then** students will persist toward stated goals (i.e., they will make **progress**). Furthermore, **if** the college assesses student progress during and after enrollment and **if** it modifies programs and services to ensure that student outcomes match goals and expectations, the college will be successful. There are inferences in this model. The first is the obvious linkage between student progress and assessment information. The second inference is between certain institutional practices—what information a college gathers about students after enrollment and how it uses this information—and student outcomes. Finally, there is an assumption—an inference—that the outcomes of education must match student goals and expectations if the institution is to be successful.

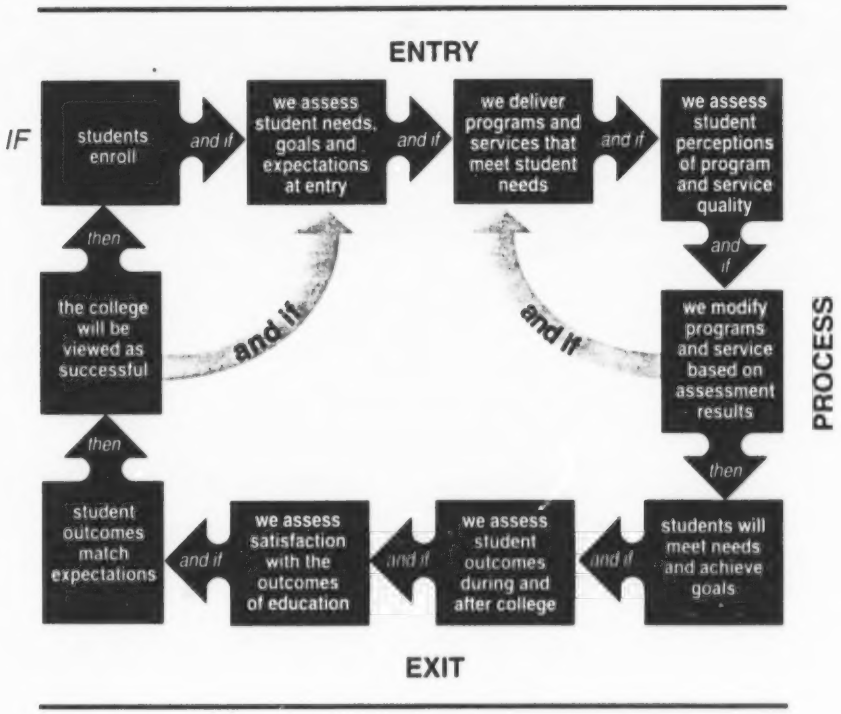


Figure 4. New Assessment Model

Let's suppose that we examine the following situation—one that should apply to all community colleges. If High Performing Community College can prepare a non-degree student with market ready technical skills after 35 credit hours of coursework (including general education), and students are satisfied with the quality of the courses, and employers hire and promote students because they have had a favorable experience with students trained in High Performing's programs, then student outcomes will match expectations and the college will be successful. The only way High Performing will know whether or not its programs and services have a favorable effect on students will be to: 1) measure student goals and expectations at entry, 2) assess student progress and outcomes, 3) measure student and employer satisfaction with programs, services, and outcomes at exit and beyond, and 4) make changes in programs and services based on assessment information.

If community colleges are to achieve maximum success with students, assessment activities must be systematically designed and reliably delivered at all stages of student contact with the institution. There is a need for much more assessment activity common to all academic programs, carried out with students at various intervals during and after college, and carried out with external groups such as business and industry employers who receive secondary benefits from education. If our colleges restrict their focus in assessment to student flow and near-term outcomes they will continue to be vulnerable to probes and inquiries from outside agencies.

Using assessment results to create programs and services that meet student needs, designing support services that assist rather than insist, and developing decision systems that encourage the use of assessment information in resource decisions are, we believe, major management challenges for the 1990s and beyond.

Organizing for Student Success

To recap what we have concluded so far, student success is a complex subject that brings together many different elements. It reflects the goals and expectations students bring with them to college, the progress they make in courses and programs, and educational outcomes which make an impression on important groups. It is helped or hindered by practices which bring superior service to students—both curricular and extra-curricular. Student success is the ultimate criterion for institutional effectiveness. Our colleges rise or fall in the eye of the public based on what students do, not what is done for them.

Further, we have concluded that colleges which engage students in academic and out-of-class activities are more likely to contribute to student success than those which do not engage students. They do so by providing quality services which inject the college into the lives of students and prevent negative outcomes from occurring. Institutions that cannot respond to the needs of students will be left further and further behind. Thus, quality of service is now a top-management issue.

Finally, the evidence from a number of successful organizations points to the concept of continuous performance assessment as a method for improving service. Performance assessment is a far cry from ongoing evaluation of instructors and courses. It is much more than completing surveys to determine how well an instructor is doing or how students feel about a course or program. Indeed performance assessment is a whole-organization approach that starts with the nature of student goals and expectations and carries over to outcomes during and after college. This approach means gathering information from students at frequent intervals and using this information to improve service.

Community colleges that have a capacity to contribute to student success are easily recognized, and their internal characteristics are easy to identify. Our research shows that high performing colleges in the area of student success share at least the following characteristics:

1. They "reach out" to students through academic and out-of-class activities.
2. They provide proactive services which meet student needs for quality, convenience, and cost while preventing negative outcomes from occurring.
3. They continually assess performance through research carried out on program and service quality.
4. They use assessment results to improve quality.

5. They have established a reputation for quality that is shared by staff, students, and external groups.

6. They have a facilitating culture—an approach to management and leadership that empowers staff to help students achieve goals.

Outreach: Key to Success. When we look at the characteristics of institutions with an orientation to student success and compare them to the findings of research, a common thread emerges. These colleges become involved with students as "whole persons" holding multiple roles and responsibilities. By virtue of their commitment to service and performance assessment, they come to know their students well. Instructors and staff reach out making help so readily available that it cannot be avoided. Virtually every institutional policy and practice—from class schedules, faculty office hours, student orientation, parking, child care, and access to support services—is carefully considered in relationship to student needs.

Moreover, high performing colleges commit staff to helping students succeed, but they also emphasize that there are many different forms of success no one of which is more important than another. Teachers and administrators are expected to reach out and support students with different goals. Assessment tells them what they must do to earn high marks. Expectations are set fairly high and staff rise to meet these expectations. They take service *seriously*; this goes beyond simply making courses and services available to students. How the institution communicates and acclimates staff to this philosophy differs among institutions, although in each instance the result is the same—reaching students through aggressive programs and services is the key to success.

The Responsive Organization. If our colleges are to become fully organized for student success, they must undergo a long, hard, and honest assessment of their behavior with regard to two basic and separate concepts—the "customer" and "service." Some questions need to be asked: What does service—inferior or superior—mean to faculty and staff? Can they appreciate the causal relationship between service and quality? Who do they define as their customers? How do we ensure that the entire college becomes truly dedicated to service? How do we determine and monitor our orientation to service?

This kind of questioning is often dismissed as an academic exercise in a fast-changing education landscape. *It is not.* Faculty, administrators, and staff must redefine their roles as the need intensifies to develop creative approaches to meet student needs. Persistent inquiry of and about students enables staff to confront gaps in the design of programs and services. This must be coupled with a vision of service and a positive attitude.

If we really want to be serious about student success, we will begin to picture our colleges as retail organizations—that is, as organizations serving citizens in the community in the same way that franchised retailers serve customers. To accomplish this, knowledge about service quality is essential. Consider some of the steps that our colleges may need to take to ensure service quality and satisfied students.

1. Gathering Information

- follow-up survey with new students during the first semester of enrollment
- student comment cards available in academic and service departments
- annual follow-up survey measuring student satisfaction with courses, programs, and services
- operational procedures for analyzing and acting on student survey data

2. Repeated Communication

- personal letter from a college administrator, counselor, or instructor welcoming a new student to the college
- telephone call to new students within 10 days after initial enrollment to discuss problems and concerns, answer questions, and to encourage them to use support services
- follow-up telephone call from an instructor, advisor, or staff member to students indicating problems or concerns

3. Face-to-Face Contact

- periodic focus group meetings with students, employers, and outside groups to see what they like and dislike about college programs and services
- service quality representatives for each academic division and service unit who can act quickly to solve student problems

4. Acting on Information

- using information obtained from students to adjust class schedules, program offerings, office hours, etc. to accommodate work schedules and personal needs
- working with students to develop a prevention orientation in academic and career advising, learning resource centers, and student services
- providing or adjusting special services (child care, transportation, peer tutoring, etc.) based on information received from students

5. Staff Training

- integrated training programs for: a) support staff, emphasizing service to internal customers, b) faculty and staff, emphasizing service to students and outside groups, and c) administrators, on how to build a service orientation
- employ the expertise of established service organizations (e.g., hotels, banks, retailers) to train staff in the art of providing excellent service

Following-up with students does two things for a college. It tells students that faculty and staff care about them, and it gives some indication of the changes that have to be made to improve quality. What can be done to educate staff to provide good service? Communication skills can

be role played in front of a video camera and then analyzed by the staff member and a skilled trainer. Staff can be given scripts to follow in order to determine a student's needs, overcome obstacles, and provide a service. Every aspect of providing a service can be explained in detail; nothing should be left to chance in the interaction between staff and students.

Reconceptualizing Management and Leadership. Community college leaders rarely have trouble describing their colleges' competitive advantage. *Our programs are unique.* Or, *we are quick response institutions that serve our communities well.* Or maybe, *we provide the highest quality instruction at a cost students can afford.* Anyone leading a community college knows the ordinary truth: a growth-oriented institution needs to operate at the cutting edge in order to stay ahead of the competition.

What many leaders do not know is how to remain at the cutting edge. Our colleges have continued growing right through the current recession. But have they done so because of strong management, high quality, favorable costs? What accounts for their success? What prevents competitors from invading their markets and learning to do exactly what they do, only better?

Our colleges have established an enormous advantage over competitors by virtue of their low cost and market relevant programs. They have not been touched by overhead cost scandals, athletic abuses, and misplaced priorities involving teaching and research. However, we cannot expect to sustain this advantage by maintaining the status quo. Community college leaders need to begin asking what has to happen inside the college to develop a new competitive edge. Presidents need to be able to "sense the marketplace" in order to have confidence that the college is moving in the right direction. Yet presidents can't do it alone. An important facet of leadership is the need for strong leaders throughout an institution. Presidents must develop strong leaders not only among senior administrators, but also among department chairs, committee heads, and staff members (Green, 1992). These people are the engine of change; without healthy, positive, and responsible leadership from the ranks, institutions will become paralyzed.

What must our colleges do to avoid paralysis? How can we remain at the cutting edge? Nothing less than a different conception of management and leadership will be required—a conception in which instructors and staff are viewed more as an investment than a cost. If staff are driven by interest and want, they will provide good service. Good service leads to quality and quality creates growth. When quality declines, so too does growth.

Until very recently, the governance structure in our colleges mirrored the administrative structure. Strategic planning was the sole prerogative of executive officers, and there was little involvement of academic departments and service units in the process. This is changing, but perhaps not quickly enough to remain at the cutting edge. The literature on complex organizations tells us that administrators and teachers in change resistant institutions consistently deny the need for change, despite the influence of external factors that are shifting faster than ever. Resistance to change is a natural outgrowth of organizations that are extremely successful. Having grown fond of tried and true practices, they are reluctant to let go. As inertia moves the college in the direction that has served it so well, the service region in which it operates moves in a different direction. Over time, the gap between outside reality and

institutional inertia widens and the college gets out of touch with its markets. Pressure builds within the institution as growth slows.

In most of our colleges the typical organizational chart shows a series of separate vertical chimneys. But in reality, most work moves horizontally, from one course or service to the next. What's more, most quality problems occur at the hand-off points in programs and services as they are delivered to students. The key, therefore, is to teach staff to treat each other as "internal" customers and suppliers, so they can understand and meet each other's valid requirements and work together to prevent problems. When administrators, teachers, and classified employees understand the basis of each other's requirements—mind-sets, job responsibilities, thinking processes, and role demands—true teamwork results and students are better served. There is no way one individual or a small group of individuals at the top of the organization can come up with all of the ideas necessary to build a solid foundation for student success. Teams can.

To operate at the cutting edge, our colleges will need to go beyond mere pruning and grafting of the administrative organization. They will need to reshape the institutional culture fundamentally transforming it into an "involving organization." Lines between administrators and teachers will need to become less distinct, and responsibility for strategic management will need to be distributed. To be worthwhile, planning will need to be done at all levels and to involve those who will implement policies, develop programs, and teach classes. Effective community colleges will implement systems for continuous environmental scanning, performance assessment, and planning at the service unit and academic department levels. In the process, faculty roles and workloads will change. Tomorrow's faculty members will do more than teach. They will forecast market conditions, plan and evaluate curricula, conduct research on student outcomes, build marketing and recruitment plans, lobby private-sector markets for resources, and perform other management functions as necessary to improve program performance. Collective bargaining contracts will need to be rewritten to simultaneously change the nature of faculty workload and maintain continuity in faculty and administrator roles (Alfred and Linder, 1990).

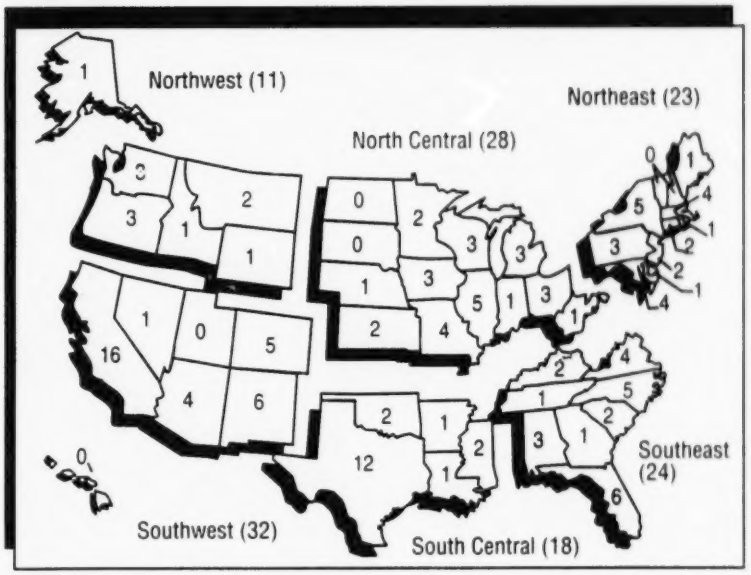
In an involving organization, it is not only necessary but also advisable to decentralize strategic planning because effective planning must be closely integrated with day-to-day operations. Such planning is an inseparable, vital part of the work of academic departments and service units. The roles of department chairs and mid-level managers will need to be changed to make sure there is a flood of information coming into the institution.

More decisions will need to be made by academic departments and service units, and every decision should focus on becoming better. Service will become the cutting edge for our colleges in the 90s. The ability to think strategically about service at all levels will distinguish high performing from low performing colleges. This kind of thinking occurs most easily in flexible organizations, in which staff are encouraged to communicate and share ideas with one another and to seek cooperative solutions working with clients.

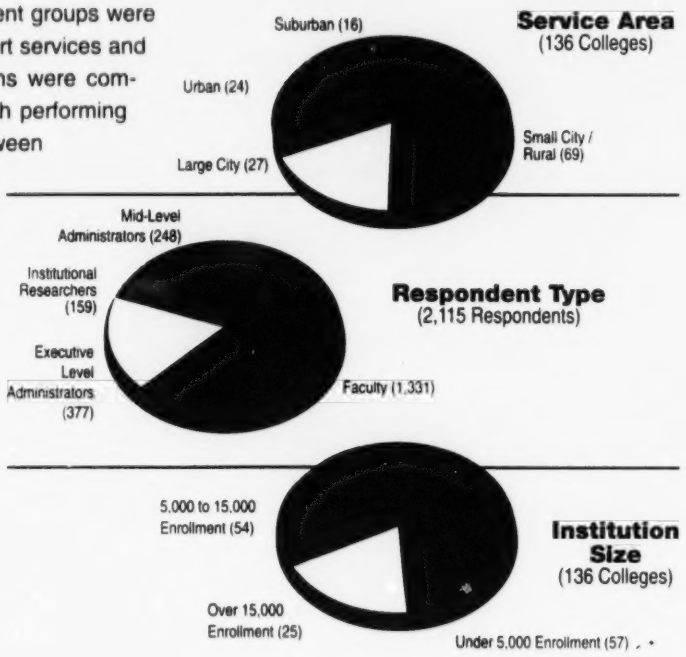
Participating Institutions and Study Methods

The study sample consisted of 172 community colleges in all 50 states selected to proportionately represent the national distribution of colleges by size (enrollment), service region (urban, suburban, large city, and small city/rural), geographic region and accrediting region. Of this number, 136 colleges (79%) participated in the study. The sample included a disproportionately large number of institutions enrolling Hispanic and African American students. The distribution of institutions by geographic region, service area, and size is shown in the accompanying charts. A total of 25 individual survey instruments were sent to each college to be distributed, to four different groups: executive administrators (5), mid-level administrators (3), research/assessment coordinators (2), and full-time faculty (15). A special effort was made to distribute faculty across occupational/career and liberal arts departments within the participating colleges. A total of 2,115 usable surveys were returned (49% response rate). The group response rates by category were: executive administrators (44%), mid-level administrators (48%), research/assessment coordinators (46%), and faculty (52%). Not all colleges had a full count in each category, which had the effect of understating the response rates.

The strategy for research was to build a model for understanding student success by examining faculty and administrative perceptions of management practices employed with



students at entry, enrollment, and exit. Different groups were surveyed to obtain their perceptions of support services and assessment practices. Next, their perceptions were compared with the management practices of high performing organizations, to determine differentials between high performing colleges and mediocre ones. The existence of a "gap" between current community college practices and those employed by high performing organizations was interpreted as evidence of problem areas in which improvements would need to be made to enhance student success.



Conclusion

What do the results of this study tell us about the culture of community colleges; about their commitment to student success? We can feel secure in the belief that our colleges are doing a good job of assessing student skills and needs at entry. However, this is only the beginning of the customer/provider relationship. Students are not simply individuals with needs that must be identified at the beginning of their relationship with the institution, not to be looked at again until resource-threatening events occur such as separation from a course, program, or the institution as a whole. Rather, students have needs that change through exposure to programs and services. The programs and services provided, the way(s) in which they are provided, the methods used to assess student outcomes, and the frequency of assessment constitute benchmarks of a college's student success orientation.

Students do not simply enroll in our colleges; they enroll with expectations. One expectation is that the programs they select or the services they use will provide benefits. Additionally, students expect that faculty and staff will be aware of the extent to which these benefits are or are not realized. Finally, they expect that if the benefits are not adequate, the institution will adjust programs and services accordingly.

An orientation to student success is a transformational concept. It is a philosophy, a thought process, a set of values and attitudes, and—sooner or later—a set of methods. To transform a community college into a student-oriented institution takes time, resources, planning, and serious commitment by faculty and administrators. The process is educationally desirable, but it is always a tall order.

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